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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide a philosophy of education for the gifted and place that philosophy within the framework of practical education. The paper sketches the philosophy--language arts must be taught in a way that emphasizes the wholeness of the language experience--and discusses two key points: (1) If language arts consist of various modes and strands that students are to develop into usable information, then the strands cannot be taught in isolation. (2) Language at either the initial or the advanced level must be acquired by students' active intervention with it. The paper then describes a wide variety of class activities involving students in comprehensive language experiences in which they read, write, research, study structures, and experiment with oral language. The paper's following section contains a list of component strands and activities, an illustration of an expandable model, and three planning sheets--for establishing goals, objectives, and strategies in composition, oral skills, and research--on: (1) research into the Elizabethan period/role playing, (2) Shakespeare and his times, and (3) Romeo and Juliet. Included with each of the three lessons are questions designed to develop activities and stimulate several levels of thinking: memory, comprehension, analysis, application, synthesis, and evaluation. (EL)

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A LITERATURE BASED LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM FOR SECONDARY GIFTED STUDENTS

(A summary of a presentation by Jo Myers and Bob Hughes made at the Annual Meeting of the Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English -- Seattle, WA, April 25-27, 1985)

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When teachers of gifted students go to seminars, take classes, and attend conventions we are told how we must teach to "the higher end of Bloom" by giving our students "higher order thinking skills." We are told how we must plan lessons which guide students into new experiences and, through these experiences, students will be challenged to learn. Very few of these lectures end in practical methods or tools to carry out the stated tasks. Most "gifted" seminars focus on the identification, placement, and special needs of the gifted student -- specific strategies are often lost somewhere in allusions to teachers' attitudes and students' capabilities.

The purpose of this article is to provide a philosophy of education for the gifted and place that philosophy within the framework of practical application. The ideas are the result of a collaborative effort between Jo Myers and myself. Our philosophy is that language arts must be taught in a way that emphasizes the wholeness of the language experience.

Jo is the department chairperson of the special services department (which includes the gifted classes) at Bethel Jr. High School where we both teach. Her thirty-five years of teaching include a variety of subject matters at elementary through high school levels. She has participated in conferences and seminars on the gifted throughout that time and has been instrumental in establishing the tone of the gifted program in our building and in our district. My areas of interest are drama and composition. As chairperson of the language arts

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department, I have worked at developing a program to integrate composition into all areas of the school's curriculum. I am a past participant of the Puget Sound Writing Program; and I have been involved in forming and our district's language arts program and philosophy.

Our collaboration resulted from our separate areas of interest. When we decided to team-teach the eighth and ninth grade gifted students, we began to combine our strengths: Jo brought her experience and knowledge of gifted students, and I contributed my experience in teaching and developing curriculum for language arts.

We both feel strongly that good planning is central to good teaching -- especially with gifted students. We, therefore, use the worksheets included at the end of this article to plan our lessons. The planning sheets were developed during a summer workshop which Jo attended at the University of Puget Sound during the summer of 1984.

The first worksheet helps us establish goals, objectives, and strategies; and it helps us to focus on the thinking skills that we will teach in each lesson. Also, the sheet gives us a place to note any resources we will need to implement the lesson. On the other planning sheet, marked "Using Questions to Develop Activities," we refine the lesson into questions that help us define the lesson's purpose. By using pre-established questioning strategies, we focus on the thinking skills that we have set as a goal in the planning

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sheet, and we are forced to see each lesson in terms of its place within the overall unit.

Integration of the ideas and skills which compose language acquisition are central to our purpose. Our philosophy is to teach every skill and piece of information as an integral portion of language. If the "language arts" consist of a variety of modes and strands, and if students are to develop these into usable information, then the strands cannot be taught in isolation. Language, at either initial or advanced levels, must be acquired by students' active interaction with it. These two statements have been echoed again and again in recent years, and most teachers accept them as axiomatic. The difficulty is in putting the ideas into practice.

For our instruction to be effective we realize that students must see it as an integral advancement of their own experience with language. In our search to provide an integrated language experience, we do not teach a lesson in "grammar" and another in "literature" and another in "composition." In the ongoing development of our lessons, then, Jo and I look for strategies which expand students' existing use and knowledge of language; and we help them expand what they already know into aspects of language that they have not yet experienced or do not yet understand.

Gifted students, especially, need to see the overall picture of the relationship among the aspects of language. They are the ones who instantly understand the purposes behind

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and we helped them develop new skills that they would need. The aspects of language that we stressed are listed on the page labeled "Component Strands..." In our district, language arts is separated into eight strands. Having decided which of the strands we will emphasize in the unit, we coordinate these into the lesson instead of isolating them into separate lessons.

.....

The first activity of this lesson is research. We put the students into groups which are responsible for coming back to the rest of the class with information on aspects of the people, time and literature. Each group has a specific assignment to research. The reports are given orally and also in written form; and we encourage students to be as original as possible in their method of presentation -- we have, for example, had several reports in the form of dramatic dialogue or imagined scenes between historic figures. As students research their topics, they aid each other in finding information, and they get help from us and the school librarian. Since we are not taking all of the class time with lectures, we are free to help students not only find information, but we are able to give them help with research techniques and sources of information in a practical way.

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Instead of being fact dispensers, we want to be resources and guides for the students as they gain knowledge.

In the research unit, students do more than a "term project." They are gathering information, distilling it, and organizing it into a useful presentation which will be a part of the overall learning unit. We want our students to see their research as an important portion of what they learn in a unit. Therefore, their research becomes a springboard for the knowledge that they will need for the rest of the term. What they learn in their research prepares them for the extended learning of the rest of the unit. Research, then, becomes a basis for learning instead of the end result. This is "real life" application: we research to learn, not to prove what we already know.

From their research of the Elizabethan period, students learn quite a bit about the people and times. The next step in the unit allows them to apply that knowledge. The first "application" assignment asks students to create a character during the Elizabethan period and then write a story about that character, using first person narrative form (By this point in the school year, students are familiar with short-story conventions. If we had not given them any prior instruction, though, this would be an excellent time to do so -- the idea is to integrate instruction as it is needed.). As a part of the class, Jo and I both write stories along with the students.

Having written their stories, students orally share them

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with the entire class. After everyone shares, students exchange stories and write new stories, interacting with each others' characters (Jo and I exchange our own). The resulting stories create a fascinating fictional society with wonderful characterizations and the beginnings of a remarkable sense of community identity for the characters.

As we taught the unit this year, students got together outside of class and invented situations where groups of characters interacted: when the stories came back to the class, more than the original two characters whom we had assigned were interacting. Throughout the process, students constantly checked and verified the accuracy of each others' roles with the information that they had garnered from the previous research unit. This intertwining of fictional lives prepares students for the next step in the unit.

Having created a character, and having brought that character to life through the two stories, students, then, breathe more life into their creations by using that persona to participate in in-role drama. Using our philosophy of integrating skills into the unit, it is at this point that we teach the students some practical aspects of dramatic technique and theater, focusing on the sense of "play" that is at the heart of theater. We do some sensitivity and awareness exercises, helping students to fully become the role that they are about to don. As they move towards developing their personal roles, we give them a sign to wear which gives the

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name and, by designating different color signs for different classes, signifies the social class status of each character.

On the day that we feel that students are ready to fully participate in their roles (without the accompanied self-consciousness and giggling that they exhibit during the first attempts to role-play), we tell them that they must separate into the three social classes which existed during the Elizabethan period. We provide a touch of realism by giving the best seats to the nobility, and by making the lower classes stand or sit on the floor. For the remainder of the time that we participate in the in-role portion of the unit, students and teachers all must stay in their roles as long as they wear their identification signs. This technique was developed by Dorothy Heathcote in England and is a great tool for getting students to empathize with the people they are studying. Each person becomes aware that he/she must act and react by the limitations of the social class of which he/she is a part. Each social class must become aware of its unique position and unique interests.

To provide a controlling factor, I adopt the role of a merchant who has news of an action that the queen is about to take which will adversely affect all of the social classes. Using what they know about the period, students must act to avert the disaster. Their dilemma is compounded by the class system which forces them to keep to their own class and defend their own interests. They must use their critical abilities

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and their knowledge of the period to solve the problem.

This year, students became engulfed in intrigue and subterfuge outside of class as some middle class merchant characters tried to forge deals to sell out their peers. The peasants instigated revolutions and plots. The upper classes avoided any action which might have put them out of the queen's favor. In the end, they all saw that they were, actually, interdependent; and, having seen that, they worked out a compromise that satisfied all parties, except for one middle-class arms dealer who was shunned by all because of his attempts to gain profit at the expense of everyone else.

The students gain a practical appreciation for the time and the circumstances of the people who lived during the era; they learn how to work in groups to solve problems; and they have their first experience with drama which prepares them for the culminating segment of the unit.

All that the students have done leads to the final lesson on Romeo and Juliet. At this point, they know some facts about the period and the author (one of the research groups presented information on Shakespeare and another on the Elizabethan theater); and they are able to put those facts into the perspective of the experiences that they have had in the previous lessons of the unit. They understand some of the conventions of theater; and they have experienced "theater" in the role-playing which they have done. They understand character development; and they have seen what is required to

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develop real, believable characters. They are now ready to experience the play itself.

Drama is not meant to be read; it is meant to be seen. Though, often times, a reader can enhance his/her understanding and appreciation for an author's skill, this is not the primary method of experiencing a play. So, we do not believe in forcing students to sit through an entire reading of a play which is difficult for even many college students to understand. Instead, we first show them the play and let them follow the plot line through the action. Zefferelli's filmed version is an excellent teaching tool because of the marvelous way that he has cinematically adapted the script, retaining the original energy of the play while remaining faithful to text. Students have difficulties in understanding some of the dialogue, but the director's style makes it easy for them to follow the plot, and they are enthralled by its grandeur and tragic, human scope.

After they have seen the play, we then look at segments of it to learn what makes Shakespeare so powerful. We look at some of the images, characterizations and conventions that give the story its depth (Shakespeare's mastery of language makes a great point of departure for discussions on what makes writing "good" or "bad" -- and this is an opportunity to expand into a lesson on sentence combining techniques to show students how they, too, can powerfully employ language).

Then we again divide into groups. Each group has a scene

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to present to the class. The groups become production teams, with responsibilities of acting, directing, costuming, scenery, and writing. The writers are responsible to adapt the scene into modern language and a modern setting. Each group presents its scene twice: once in its original setting and once in a modern setting. In this final activity, students use the learned experiences from all of the previous activities in the unit to create finished "products."

.....

The focus of this presentation is not to have anyone duplicate the activities that we use, though you are more than welcome to do so. What we advocate is that teachers of gifted students need to see the need for integration of curricula. If the scope of our class would have allowed us, we could have included subjects as supposedly diverse as science (the Renaissance was the age of discovery, after all) or mathematics or whatever. Our system of education is in danger of compartmentalizing education so much that students lose sight of the inherent connections among all learning. And without understanding those connections, they will become myopic and single-mindedly unable to cope with the rapidly changing world that awaits them.

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In the unit that I have described, here, students were involved in a comprehensive language experience. They wrote, studied structures, researched, experimented with oral language, and they read. They did all of the activities that are customary in traditional English/language arts classes. None of the activities is particularly innovative or unique. The difference is in the integration of these often segmented concepts.

Our goal for the students in our classes should be to show them the links, to bring learning into the unified, whole process that it is. We should teach (this is especially true with language) so that students can expand the natural experiences which they have had since birth. Developing a lesson for this type of teaching takes time to plan clearly-defined goals and strategies, but the results are worth it. Students need to be given the opportunity to see the connection that Shakespeare has to the basic functions of grammar and how drama and short stories and history are all different manifestations of the the same language. Having seen those connections, the process of learning them becomes more human, more relevant to their own experiences. And by providing a multifaceted approach, with a variety of experiences, students' varying learning styles are also taken into account. In our experiences of developing these activities and this philosophy, we have found effective tools for teaching our students about the power of their language.

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A LITERATURE BASED LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM FOR GIFTED SECONDARY STUDENTS

Jo Myers

Bob Hughes

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Spanaway, Wash.

1985

COMPONENT STRANDS AND ACTIVITIES

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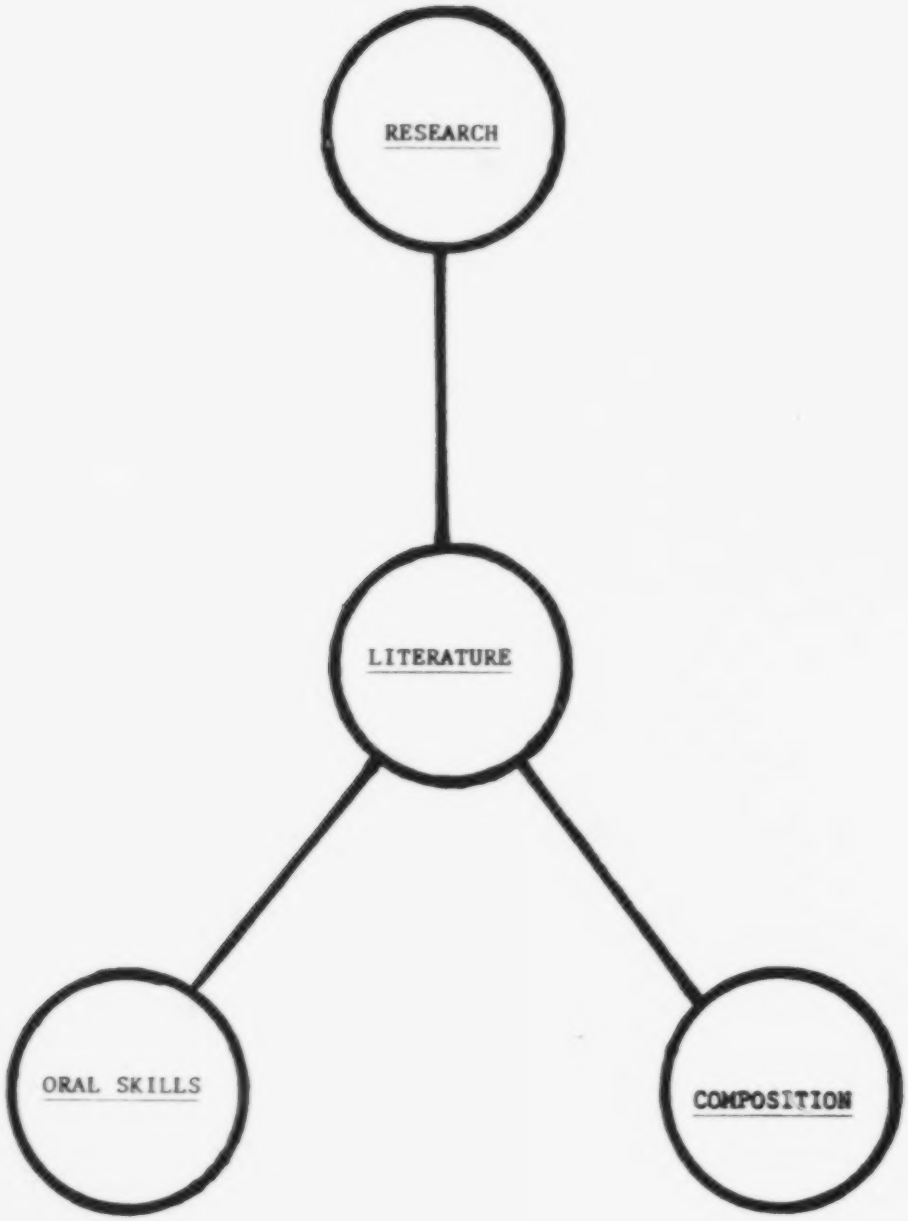
Literature	Composition	Oral Skills	Research	Unit
	1.Written reports 2. Note taking 3. Elizabetha Age Story	1.Role playing/ conflict resolution	Group reports: 1. History 2. Lifestyles 3. Social Conditions 4. Traditions 5. Education 6. Theater	(1)
	Note taking	Discussion	Group Reports (above)	(2)
Romeo and Juliet	1. Script writing 2. Paraphrasing/ translation	Acting	1. Production technique 2. Costuming	(3)

The key to this process is integration. All of the components are presented as an integral part of the whole. Composition is taught as an extension of the classroom, research, and reading activities. The composition prepares students for the roles which they assume in the role-playing activities. The composition, research, and role playing prepare students for their activities with Romeo and Juliet.

The teacher is the guide in all of this. She/he provides the structure and helps students see what they miss. The teacher also works to remediate difficulties which students need to overcome. Instead of giving isolated units to the entire class on research, drama, composition, etc., the teacher can work with the individual needs of students as they occur. In this way, the teacher can avoid having most of the class being retaught a skill which most of them possess. If a large portion of the class needs remediation on the same problem, the teacher can take time for whole-group instruction.

This process makes learning the journey that it should be instead of the isolated bits of experiences which it often becomes.

Jo Myers
Bob Hughes
Bethel Jr. High, 1985



THIS MODEL CAN BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE ALL BRANCHES OF LANGUAGE ARTS

Myers and Hughes
1985

UNIT: Elizabethan Period Drama TIME: 4 weeks LEVEL: Secondary

Goal: Students will understand and appreciate the forces which motivated the authors of this period and will be able to create a character for themselves in the period.

Long-Range Objectives:

Students will know contributing factors to the drama of the Elizabethan Age

Short-Range Objectives:

Students will be able to create and act out a character

Students will learn methods of conflict resolution

(OVER)

FACTS KNOWLEDGE TO BE LEARNED	RELATED ACTIVITIES	S/T	MATERIALS	S/T
Facts of the: history lifestyles social conditions traditions education theater of the Elizabethan Age	-division into groups -lecture for background information -research -report -organization -develop sources for research	T T S S S S/T	-library resources -art supplies	T S/T
THINKING SKILLS TO STRESS knowledge comprehension synthesis analysis evaluation	-participate in "in-role" drama -create a character for class drama and write a story in which the character interacts with another student/ character	S/T S/T		
ATTITUDES, APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING TO GAIN understanding of living conditions of the time the difficulty and benefits of community effort				
MEANS OF EVALUATION A final report which shows how the group has resolved the conflict				

* S=Student T=Teacher

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Short-Range Objectives (continued)

Students will be able to research and synthesize information.
Students will be able to give a well-organized report, extending her/his own learning to that of her/his peers.
Students will organize and develop reports as group members.

Using Questions to Develop Activities

Purpose: Questions can be used as the core for developing activities. You can write varied questions on a subject area by using levels of thinking (based on Bloom) which become progressively more sophisticated: from "memory" at the top to "evaluation" at the bottom.

Directions: Choose a content area, then create one question per level, and you've created a learning activity.

LEVELS OF THINKING

What is the content area? Research into the Elizabethan Period/ Role Playing

THINK. LEVELS	FOCUS	ON APPLYING THE LEVELS
Memory	What	is the lifestyle of that period?
	How or where	is drama used?
	When or how	did "theater" happed?
Comprehension	What	can you say about the beliefs and traditions of the period?
	How	can you discuss the educational system in (quantity) 2 of words? (paragraphs)
	Which	is the best answer to this question about it?
	Which	comes first: the Renaissance or the Middle Ages?
	How	can you arrange this period's histor to the right order?
Analysis	What	are the parts or features of the social class syster?
	How	is the middle clas related to the other two classes?
Application	What	is the solution to the "water problem"?
	Why or how	is social class related to lifestyle?
	How	can you use role playing to solve the problem of no water?
Synthesis	What	could be changed (added or combined with) the class structure to make a new class syster?
	What	is another way to divide people socially?
	How	could you design or use a new solution to the "water problem"?
Evaluation	How	could you compare Elizabethan life to yours?
	How	can you support your "water problem" or convince someone of its validity?
	How	could you measure/judge the effectiveness of your solution?
	When	could role playing be used suitably?

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UNIT: Shakespeare and His Times	TIME: 1 week	LEVEL: Secondary

Goal: Students will appreciate and understand the background and writings of William Shakespeare.

Long-Range Objectives:
Students will be able to act out a passage of a Shakespearean play and will be able to translate the language into modern form.

Short-Range Objectives:
(see listed objectives for Romeo and Juliet unit)

FACTS/KNOWLEDGE TO BE LEARNED	RELATED ACTIVITIES	S/T	MATERIALS	S/T
1. History of surrounding period 2. Important biographical information about Shakespeare 3. Theater of Shakespeare's time	-research -lecture -discussion -oral reports	S T S/T S	-library resources -art supplies	S/T S/T
THINKING SKILLS TO STRESS 1. Knowledge and comprehension 2. Analysis 3. Synthesis 4. Evaluation				
ATTITUDES, APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING TO GAIN 1. Enjoyment of Shakespeare's work 2. Appreciation for the historical age which surrounds Shakespeare's writing				
MEANS OF EVALUATION Oral reports				

Teacher: [illegible]

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Using Questions to Develop Activities

Purpose: Questions can be used as the core for developing activities. You can write varied questions on a subject area by using levels of thinking (based on Bloom) which become progressively more sophisticated: from "memory" at the top to "evaluation" at the bottom.

Directions: Choose a content area, then create one question per level, and you've created a learning activity.

What is the content area? Shakespeare and His Times

LEVELS OF THINKING

THINK. LEVELS	FOCUS	ON APPLYING THE LEVELS
Memory	What	is life like during this time?
	Where	are the ideas developed during Shakespeare's time evident today?
	When or how	did "Theater" happen?
Comprehension	What	can you say about Elizabethan drama?
	How	can you discuss the beginnings "theater" in (quantity) 2 of words? (paragraphs)
	Which	is the best answer to this question about it?
	Which	comes first: mystery/morality or open air theaters?
	How	can you arrange theater history in the right order?
Analysis	What	are the parts or features of an Elizabethan theater?
	How	is Shakespeare's life related to his drama?
Application	What	is the solution to ?
	Why or how	is a historical age related to a dramatic piece?
	How	can you use dramatic technique to solve the problem of personal conflict?
Synthesis	What	could be changed (added or combined with) to make a new ?
	What	is another way to enjoy Shakespeare?
	How	could you design or use Shakespeare's life to learn more about the period?
Evaluation	How	could you compare Elizabethan to today's drama?
	How	can you support your comparison or convince someone of your observations?
	How	could you measure/judge enjoyment of drama?
	When	could dramatic technique be used suitably in teaching or learning

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UNIT: Romeo and Juliet | TIME: 3 weeks | LEVEL: Secondary

Goal: Students will read, appreciate, and have knowledge of Romeo and Juliet.

Long Range Objective:
Students will participate in the performance of a dramatic scene.

Short Range Objectives:
Students will translate a given scene into modern language.
Students will perform one of the tasks needed to produce a play.

FACTS/KNOWLEDGE TO BE LEARNED	RELATED ACTIVITIES	S/T	MATERIALS	S/T
1. Dramatic production skills. 2. Paraphrasing/translation 3. Elements of the play: plot setting characterizations	-script writing -costuming -scenery production -acting -stage mgmt.	S S S S S	-Romeo and Juliet, HBJ, 1980 -video camera -art supplies -props	T T T S/T
THINKING SKILLS TO BE LEARNED 1. Knowledge and comprehension 2. Analysis 3. Application 4. Synthesis 5. Evaluation				
ATTITUDES, APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING TO GAIN 1. Appreciation of dramatic arts 2. Elementary understanding of Shakesperean language				
MEANS OF EVALUATION Dramatic performances				

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Using Questions to Develop Activities

Purpose: Questions can be used as the core for developing activities. You can write varied questions on a subject area by using levels of thinking (based on Bloom) which become progressively more sophisticated: from "memory" at the top to "evaluation" at the bottom.

Directions: Choose a content area, then create one question per level, and you've created a learning activity.

What is the content area? Romeo and Juliet

LEVELS OF THINKING

THINK. LEVELS	FOCUS	ON APPLYING THE LEVELS
Memory	What	is plot setting and characterization
	How or where	is setting used? in developing the script
	When or history	did the play happen?
Comprehension	What	can you say about each of the main characters ?
	How	can you discuss the plot in (quantity) 3 of words? sentences
	Which	is the best answer to this question about it?
	Which	comes first: family strife or their love ?
	How	can you arrange the conflicts in the right order?
Analysis	What	are the parts or features of (scenes) the play ?
	How	is the plot related to characterization and setting?
Application	What	is the solution to the lover's first conflict ?
	Why or how	is the plot related to characterization and setting?
	How	can you use love to solve the problem of warring families ?
Synthesis	What	could be changed (added or combined with) in scene ( ) to make a new resolution ?
	What	is another way to ?
	How	could you design or use the plot of R.J. to create your own, modern version.
Evaluation	How	could you compare your perfomance to Zefferelli's ?
	How	can you support your paraphrase or convince someone of its validity ?
	How	could you measure/judge someone's right to love whom they want?
	When	could be used suitably?

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